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'THE GOD OF WINE,' AND 'THE RIVER'S BOUNTY.'



THE beautiful companion-pieces engraved for this number of the *Art Journal*, by Mr. Linton, and entitled 'The God of Wine' and 'The River's Bounty,' are pleasing not only in themselves, but also as evidences of a new and better epoch in German art. After the war with France, the German painters were stimulated to great activity by the prevalent abundance of money, but many of the pictures which they produced were, to say the least, no credit to them; and even as late as December of last year we were told that, so great was the stagnation in real Art, that even patriotism itself could find little to praise. "Everywhere a meritorious endeavour is seen to prevail, but at scarcely any of the exhibitions has there been more than mediocre attainment. Domestic *genre*, both of the sentimental and mildly humorous description, floods the exhibitions to the almost entire exclusion of historic or poetic subjects." But there is something very poetic in the conception and treatment of 'The God of Wine,' by F. Barth, and 'The River's Bounty,' by Kneupfer; one might venture so far as to say that Rubens himself would have been interested in them. In the former picture, the god of wine, holding in his extended right hand the broad goblet which his young attendant fills to overflowing with the ruby juice, while another cherub-like assistant holds up the heavily-laden vines, and a third pipes a festal song, is a creature much more glad and winning than the traditional obese Bacchus. His face, to be sure, reveals his fondness for potations, but there is no coarseness in the features. Even the eyes, though somewhat dulled, can scarcely be called heavy. The scene is radiant and rich with—

"... Heart-easing mirth
Whom lovely Venus at a birth
To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore;"

while, in the latter picture, are—

"Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,
Nods and becks and wreathed smiles,"

as the bright little offspring of Neptune, shall we say?—one of them seems to have stolen his father's trident—drag in the net filled with fine fish, and bear away a basketful in triumph.

Mr. Linton's translation of these pictures will not fail to impress

itself upon the casual spectator. His success in the reproduction and treatment of flesh in his wood-engravings, very generally recognised though it is, has not often been more pronounced than in the present instance—the limbs and breast of the youthful god of wine being very noticeable examples. One sometimes wonders, while in the presence of this engraver's most conspicuous successes, whether or not Mr. Linton would be equal to the task of giving to the world an adequate translation of such a work as Leonardo's celebrated portrait, 'La Joconde,' in the gallery of the Louvre. The attempt to translate it into black-and-white has been made scores of times, by perhaps the best engravers in Europe, but nobody, we venture to say, who has seen the original, has ever seen an engraving of it which really pleased him—which did not, on the contrary, cause him involuntarily to shut his eyes in order that the lovely image cherished in his memory might stand out more boldly, disconnected with this and every other copy of it. Perhaps it would be impossible to make a worthy engraving after 'La Joconde;' but, if it were possible, Mr. Linton's successes in many arduous encounters point to him as one fit to make the trial. The difficulties of a fine rendering of colour in black-and-white are so great, the proper treatment especially of *contours* and masses is so rare, and the production of tones at once delicate and rich makes such draughts upon the resources of good workmanship, that a first-rate engraver is almost as scarce a phenomenon as a first-rate painter. Not only must his eye be sensitive to the influences of local colour and tone, but his heart must be actively, and his hand capably, enlisted in the work of translating them.

The face of the principal child in 'The River's Bounty' is perhaps slightly too oldish in expression, but this criticism applies primarily, doubtless, to the painting rather than to the engraving. The variety in the types of the heads is noticeable, the composition of the pictures is exceedingly happy, and the execution brilliant. The ordinary faults of monotony, affectation, and mannerism, do not appear.

The painters, B. Kneupfer and F. Barth, are comparatively young German artists, whose works are well known in Berlin. The former's latest picture is 'Götz of Berlichingen,' and the latter's latest picture, 'Tasso and the Two Eleonores,' which obtained a very considerable success. Mr. Barth recently painted, also, 'The Choice of the Caskets,' a scene from the "Merchant of Venice."

FRENCH PICTURES IN LONDON.



AT the French Gallery, London, there is a painting by Gérôme entitled 'An Eastern Woman,' which is described as a good example of the painter's technical powers, but it has no pretensions to represent his dramatic or his pathetic vein. In one respect this figure of a woman leaning against the stone doorway of a house, her arm behind her head, a diaphanous veil pressed by the breeze close to her face and figure, both of which are distinctly visible through them, while her lower limbs are clad in a petticoat of rich crimson colour, may be called an impersonation of lewdness; and such is the impression made by the face and general air of the woman. The veils cover but do not hide her tawny skin; the green one imparts, as might be expected, a disagreeable lividness to the hard and metallic carnations; the black veil serves a better purpose, but even here, and hardly less so in the naked arms, the dull lustreless flesh of M. Gérôme is displayed unpleasantly. It is quite devoid of that inner gold which glows through the dusky carnations of Titian and the softer greys of Correggio. The solid modelling, sound but not refined drawing, the animated attitude, the vitalised aspect of the figure as a whole, are present in this, as in all M. Gérôme's works. A painting by M. A. de Neuville, styled 'Le Bourget, Octobre 30, 1870,' represents the climax of the defence of a church by a small

body of French against an overwhelming force of Prussians, who had to bring artillery to shatter the walls and pierce the doors before the defenders were compelled to yield. Surrender they did at last, but they made the invaders pay dearly for their victory. M. de Neuville has often told the tale of French heroism during the war, but he never did so with more spirit and energy than in this instance. As a picture, this example exhibits the firmness of hand and mastery over details, that rare skill in dealing with accessories and costume which have never failed M. de Neuville since the days of the "Voie Ferrée," and all his tact of illustration to boot. But it needs force of chiaroscuro, or ordering of colour, and light, and shadow, so as to bring its elements in masses, and broaden the effect; of *effect*, in the artistic sense of the term, this painting has next to none. 'A Halberdier,' by M. Meissonier, standing, pike in hand, in a guard-room, has too much the appearance of having been, so to say, "done on purpose." Like most of his productions, this is an inestimable gem in its way, and quite beyond price according to its own standard, and yet it lacks many of the qualities which are essentially pictorial. It is exactly what Teniers aimed at in those pictures of his which compare best with it. As firm and clear and crisp as the Dutchman's works, this miniature is far more solid, more searchingly wrought than they are; equal to them in colour, better in atmosphere, and not inferior in character.